

## INTRODUCTION

What is philosophical "naturalism"? The term is a familiar one nowadays, but there is little consensus on its meaning. For some philosophers, the defining characteristic of naturalism is the affirmation of a continuity between philosophy and empirical science. For others the rejection of dualism is the crucial requirement. Yet others view an externalist approach to epistemology as the essence of naturalism.

I shall not engage directly with this issue. It is essentially a terminological matter. The important question is which philosophical positions are right, not what to call them. I suspect that the main reason for the terminological unclarity is that nearly everybody nowadays wants to be a "naturalist", but the aspirants to the term nevertheless disagree widely on substantial questions of philosophical doctrine. The moral is that we should address the substantial philosophical issues first, and worry about the terminology afterwards. Once we have worked out which commitments ought to be upheld by philosophers who aspire to "naturalism", then we can agree to use the term accordingly.

As it happens, I am in favour of a naturalist answer to all the general questions raised above, as will become clear from the arguments which follow: that is, I am against dualism and epistemological internalism, and in favour of the view that philosophy is continuous with empirical science. But there is a further strand to my naturalism, which I shall defend in the first two chapters, and which takes it beyond these general commitments. This further commitment is physicalism, the thesis that all natural phenomena are, in a sense to be made precise, physical.

At one time I intended to call this book "Philosophical Physicalism" rather than "Philosophical Naturalism", on the grounds that "physicalism" is a more informative term than "naturalism". But I decided against this for two reasons. First, the title "Physicalism" might have carried the suggestion that my philosophical stance is tied to the categories of current physical theory, whereas my position, as we shall see, is formulated, not in terms of current physics, but in terms of the science of whatever categories eventually turn out to be needed to explain the behaviour of matter. And, second, the last two-thirds of the book move away from the details of physicalism as such, and address issues about mind and knowledge that arise, not just for strict physicalists, but for anyone of more generally naturalist inclinations.

In detail the plan of the book is as follows. There are three sections -- Physicalism, Mind, Knowledge -- and each section contains two chapters.

In the first chapter I argue that physicalism is not a prejudice, but a consequence of some evident truths. The second chapter then argues that physicalism also requires reductionism, except about phenomena that are the products of selection processes.

In the second section I discuss mental representation and consciousness. Chapter 3 offers a detailed version of the teleological theory of mental representation, a theory which I have defended in previous writings. I explain the relationship between this theory and other views, and I defend it against various objections. Chapter 4 deals with consciousness. I argue that there is nothing in consciousness to threaten physicalism, and I try to unravel some of the reasons why consciousness has seemed to many philosophers to offer such a threat.

In the final section, on Knowledge, I offer a principled defence of a reliabilist theory of knowledge, a defence which shows how reliabilism can yield an adequate response to the problem of induction, and to sceptical arguments generally. This defence of reliabilism comprises chapter 5. Chapter 6 then addresses the special epistemological issues that arise for mathematical knowledge, and considers some comparisons between mathematical, moral, and modal knowledge.

I said above that my overall position will imply a naturalist stance on the issues of dualism, epistemological externalism, and the continuity of philosophy with the empirical sciences. The first two issues will be dealt with at length in what follows; in particular, the arguments of sections 1 and 2 will bear on dualism, and section 3 will be concerned with epistemology. But the third issue, the continuity of philosophy with empirical science, will not be explicitly discussed in the rest of the book. So let me conclude this introduction with some brief comments on this topic.

At one level, the continuity of philosophy and empirical science is uncontentious. Many philosophical problems arise because of apparent tensions or conflicts within the assumptions which empirical evidence recommends to us. The most obvious examples are issues in the philosophy of science, such as problems about the interpretation of quantum mechanics, or the asymmetry of time, or the logic of natural selection. But other less specialist philosophical questions, like the existence of free will, also arise because of difficulties raised by empirical assumptions (in particular, in this case, by assumptions about the extent to which human beings are subject to the same laws of nature as the rest of the world).

This is not to say that these philosophical issues are no different from the kinds of issues normally addressed by natural scientists. Philosophical problems are characterized by a special kind of difficulty, a difficulty which means that they cannot be solved, as scientific problems normally are, simply by the uncovering of further empirical evidence. Rather they require some conceptual unravelling, a careful unpicking of implicit ideas, often culminating in the rejection of assumptions we didn't realize we had. But, still, despite these differences, there is clearly a sense in which philosophical thinking of this kind is part and parcel of the construction of scientific theories. Even if there is no direct involvement with empirical evidence, the task of the philosophers is to bring coherence and order to the total set of assumptions we use to explain the empirical world.

The question at issue is whether all philosophical theorizing is of this kind. Naturalists will say that it is. Those with a more traditional attitude to philosophy will disagree. These traditionalists will allow, of course, that some philosophical problems, problems in applied philosophy, as it were, will fit the above account. But they will insist that when we turn to "first philosophy", to the investigation of such fundamental categories thought and knowledge, then philosophy must proceed independently of science.

Naturalists will respond that there is no reason to place even first philosophy outside science. They will point out that even the investigation of basic topics like thought and knowledge needs to start somewhere, with some assumptions about the nature of the human mind and its relation to the rest of reality. Without any assumptions to work from, investigation would be paralyzed. And the obvious strategy, naturalists will argue, is to begin with our empirically best-attested theories of the mind and its

relation to reality, and use these as a framework within which to raise and resolve philosophical difficulties, in the way outlined above.

Traditionalists will counter that we are not entitled to any empirically-based assumptions until we have somehow established the legitimacy of empirical knowledge by independent means. Maybe, they will concede, we need some assumptions of some sort to start with. But, on pain of pre-empting important philosophical questions, they had better be assumptions we can establish by such arguably incontrovertible methods as introspection, conceptual analysis, or deduction, and not assumptions which rest on the all-too-questionable principles of empirical investigation.

This argument, that philosophy needs firmer foundations than those available within empirical science, has undoubtedly been of great influence on the modern Western conception of philosophical method. But it is important to realize that this argument itself derives from various specific philosophical assumptions, and is by no means a necessary consequence of the very idea of philosophical activity. In particular, as I shall show in chapter 5, this argument depends on the assumption that claims to knowledge need to be certain, in the sense that they should derive from methods that necessarily deliver truths. Once you accept this requirement on knowledge, then you will indeed demand that philosophical knowledge in particular should come from such arguably incontrovertible methods as introspection, conceptual analysis, and deduction; and the epistemological status of science will remain in question until such time as philosophy succeeds in showing how it too satisfies the demand of certainty.

On the other hand, if we reject the idea that knowledge demands certainty, as I shall urge in chapter 5, then this whole line of argument for first philosophy falls away. For, as I shall also show in chapter 5, the rejection of certainty removes the rationale for restricting our initial methods to introspection, analysis, and deduction, and therewith removes the rationale for eliminating scientific assumptions from the framework within which we do philosophy.

So the dialectical situation is as follows. If you hold that knowledge requires certainty, then you will hold that philosophy needs to come before science. If you reject this demand, as I shall in chapter 5, then you will have reason to regard philosophy as continuous with science. But there is also a prior procedural question, about which philosophical methodology should be used to address this issue: that is, when we address the issue of whether knowledge requires certainty, should we do so within the constraints of first philosophy, or as a topic within a naturalized philosophy? When I turn to this topic of knowledge and certainty in chapter 5, I shall proceed in the latter way, and conduct my argument within the framework of various empirical assumptions about the nature and needs of human beings. My defence of this strategy is that the onus surely lies with those who want to exclude relevant and well-confirmed empirical claims from philosophical debate to provide some prior rationale for doing so. (If there are readers who find this unconvincing, I would ask them to wait until chapter 5 before passing final judgement; it is relevant that the empirical assumptions I use there are not esoteric discoveries of physiological theory, but mundane truisms about human capabilities.)

One last point about the relationship between philosophy and science. If we set philosophy within science, this does not mean that the epistemological status of science is not itself a proper topic for philosophical debate. Naturalism can perfectly well investigate the status of scientific knowledge, and indeed much of chapter 5 below will consist of just such an investigation. All that naturalism claims is that this investigation, like any other philosophical investigation, is best conducted with the framework of our empirical knowledge of the world.